

STATE OF MAINE
Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices
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LOCAL PARTY ACTIVIST ADVICE

The Maine Ethics Commission staff frequently receives questions from local party activists regarding how they can help candidates within the boundaries of the law. New laws make it easier for you to help candidates in 2006. This advice is presented to assist you, but not as a replacement for the law.

Permitted Party Activities

CAMPAIGN EVENTS

A party committee can pay for a campaign event where 3 or more candidates attend without it counting as a contribution.

CONTRIBUTING TO A CANDIDATE

- Maine Clean Election Act candidates are prohibited from accepting any contributions.
- For all other candidates:
 - Up to \$250 per election for county and legislative candidates.
 - Up to \$500 per election for gubernatorial candidates.
 - In-Kind contributions count toward these limits.

HOUSE PARTIES

The use of real or personal property and the cost of invitations, food and beverages, voluntarily provided by an individual to a candidate in rendering voluntary personal services for candidate-related activities, if the cumulative value of these activities does not exceed \$100 (per volunteer) with respect to any election.

IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS

- Not permitted for MCEA candidates; contribution limits apply to traditional candidates.
- Goods & Services (anything of value) given to a candidate at or below fair market value.
- Expenditures made in consultation or coordination with a candidate, their committee or agents.

OFFICE SUPPORT

You can provide office support for your candidates provided that there is no additional cost to you. For example, you can have a phone bank at your office, provide a computer for research, or a photocopier to a candidate, if no additional cost exists to do so.

SLATE CARDS

This exception in the law is only available to political parties at the state or local level and will not be counted toward an MCEA opponent's matching funds provided the criteria below are met. If the criteria are not met, MCEA opponents may be eligible for matching funds. The criteria are:

- Must list 3 or more candidates;
- Distributed through public advertising (radio, TV, newspapers, direct mail, e-mail, internet sites, etc.);
- Substantially treats all candidates in the same manner; and
- Content of the communication is limited to:
 - Identification of each candidate (pictures can be included);
 - Offices sought;
 - Offices currently held by the candidates;
 - Party affiliation;
 - A brief statement about the party or candidates positions, goals, philosophy, goals, accomplishments, or biographies;
 - Encouragement to vote for the candidates identified; and
 - Information about voting (hours and locations).

VOTER LISTS

Party committees can provide any voter lists they obtain, either at cost or not, free-of-charge to a candidate. It is not considered an in-kind contribution.

Reports, Laws, Questions

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Your local party committee may need to file none, some or all of the following reports depending on your level of political activity in 2006. Please be aware of what activities trigger reporting requirements as the penalties for late filing are defined in statute and can be quite expensive.

Campaign Finance Reports

Once a party committee raises or spends more than \$1,500 in a calendar year they must file campaign finance reports with the Commission through the end of the year. These reports disclose all financial activity by the party. In 2006 there are three filing deadlines for this report (July 15, October 27, and January 16, 2007).

24-Hour Reports

If a party committee receives or spends and obligates more than \$1,000 within the last 11 days before the election, they must file a 24-Hour Report of Late Contributions and Expenditures with the Commission.

Independent Expenditure Reports

An independent expenditure is any expenditure made for communications mentioning a candidate during an election period. If you've made one or more expenditures on behalf of a candidate that total more than \$250, you have to report those expenditures on a special report within 24 hours, regardless of when the expenditure is made. If you make expenditures of \$100 - \$250 per candidate during the last 11 days before the election, you also must report those within 24 hours. That's 24 hours of making the expenditure or obligation.

Expenditures made of \$100 - \$250 12 days or more before an election are reported quarterly. These reports are due on April 10, July 15, and October 10, and October 26, 2006 and January 16, 2007. You don't have to report independent expenditures on behalf of a candidate as long as the total spent never goes over \$100. But remember, it's the total spent on each candidate that triggers whether you have to file a report, not just the amount of a single expenditure.

Any communication made within the last 21 days of an election that names or depicts a candidate is presumed to be an independent expenditure if an MCEA candidate is in the race. More than 21 days before an election, a communication must expressly advocate the election or defeat of a candidate to be considered an independent expenditure. Slate cards are exempt from the independent expenditure reporting, but not the 24-Hour reporting requirements listed above.

LAWS

It is the responsibility of the party to know the campaign finance laws. Your state party can assist you with understanding the laws, in addition to the Commission's staff. Campaign finance laws are available on the Commission's website: www.maine.gov/ethics/LawsandRules.htm

CONTACT THE COMMISSION

The law can be confusing and Commission staff would like to help you understand them so your party can effectively help candidates in 2006. Please feel free to call the Commission's main line (207) 287-4179 or the party registrar directly at (207) 287-6221